

BATTLE OF DALE FARM

Echo Friday October 21, 2011

5



■ Shoulder to shoulder – the Dale Farm travellers staged a symbolic walkout from the illegal site as they admitted defeat

Picture: ANNA LUKALA BA50962_006

Travellers leave Dale Farm with 'heads held high'

By JON AUSTIN and STEPHEN HACKWELL

THEY had vowed to fight to the death, but after less than 48 hours, travellers and protesters had all but given up.

More than 100 people walked through the remains of the iconic barrier at Dale Farm, Crays Hill, just before 5pm yesterday.

Most travellers who left the illegal camp yesterday simply pitched up on empty legal pitches next door in Oak Lane, as they had threatened to do earlier this year.

Three caravans left the area completely.

The dramatic walkout followed more tension on the site, that saw the iconic scaffold barrier demolished and five people arrested, taking the total to 39 for the two days.

Shouts of "Save Dale Farm" rang

out as the crowd, some hand in hand and others clutching family portraits, surrounded by a media scrum, made their way along Oak Lane.

Traveller Kathleen McCarthy said: "Our message is that, as supporters and residents, we leave with our heads held high."

"It's a terrible moment, very sad, but the time has come. Our message to the council is shame on the council – you have left us homeless."

John Gore, who moved his mother's caravan to his brother's legal plot, said: "We've got to go now."

"This is not a place to stay any more."

However, others hinted the battle

was not over. One man, who would not be named, said: "We'll be here tomorrow. We're not going anywhere. This isn't over."

One of the protesters, who would be named only as Rich, said: "We've done what we came to do. We've made a stand and we've shown the world that Dale Farm is a real community."

Stuart Hardwicke Carruthers, a campaigner for the travellers, said there were about 20 people left on three plots on the illegal site that were protected because of a council technical error.

Council leader Tony Ball said: "This is very encouraging to see the travellers and their supporters leaving Dale Farm in a peaceful and dignified manner, something that I have always urged and called for."

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BATTLE OF DALE FARM

I'll stay put, says Danny Sheridan, 66

A TRAVELLER who lives on one of the three protected plots on Dale Farm has vowed to stay put, even if the site becomes a "ghost town".

Under a recent High Court ruling, Basildon Council cannot remove any caravans from three plots, although it is allowed to dig up the hard-standing.

Danny Sheridan, 66, owns one of the plots in the illegal half of the site and says he will never leave.

He said: "I am staying here. I've been here two years and I'm not going anywhere. I'll put down some matting or something. It will be all right.

"It may be a ghost town, but that doesn't bother me."

The plots enjoy protection because council officers failed to mention the removal of caravans when they issued the initial eviction notices nearly a decade ago.

There were no caravans on the plots at the time, but they have now been occupied by relatives of Danny and his partner Rita Sheridan, 59.

Yesterday, each of the three plots had at least four caravans crammed into its boundaries.

Danny said: "I don't know what will happen to the other caravans. They can stay there for the moment.

Council bosses have said they may consider issuing new eviction notices to close the loophole once the initial site clearance is completed.



■ Moving out – one of the travellers leaves the site

Pictures: ANNA LUKALA BA50962_60

BATTLE OF DALE FARM

5ft wall of mud will bar access back on to site

A FIVE-FOOT wall of mud around Dale Farm will stop travellers moving caravans back on to the site once it has been cleared.

It will be similar to the walls built at the Hovefields site in Wickford, which was cleared between 2005 and 2010.

Tony Ball, leader of Basildon Council, said: "The land will be turned over and bunds will be put in so there is effectively a wall round the site to stop cars and other vehicles getting on to the land.

"The land will be accessible by foot because it is the travellers' land and they will be able to walk on it.

"But we will make sure no vehicles

By MELISSA HILLS
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will be able to get back on to the land. "There will also be security at the site, how long for I cannot say, because that is an operational decision."

The council will also apply for a High Court injunction which would mean travellers were in contempt of court if they returned.

This would mean they could be jailed or have assets seized. Many people argue the eviction could have been avoided if the council served an injunction against the site several years ago.

Mr Ball also said Basildon Council would be looking to recuperate some of the taxpayers' money and try to recover some of the cost of the eviction.

He said: "We have made it clear we will claim back as much as we can from the travellers. We have had costs awarded to us for the failed judicial reviews which we will recover. If the money cannot be claimed back from the travellers then we do have the right to seize the land for monetary value.

"We do not know how much the costs are for the site clearance, it will all become very clear in the very near future."



■ Twilight – bailiffs at Dale Farm as the sun sets on day two of the eviction

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Residents brand departure 'a joke'

RESIDENTS welcomed the travellers' departure from Dale Farm, but branded it a joke that many had moved just yards to the legal site.

Residents in Crays Hill are convinced some of the Dale Farm residents own or have access to empty legal pitches next door, but wanted to get planning permission on the illegal site to increase the land value.

David McPherson-Davis, a Ramsden Crays parish councillor, said: "The fact they have moved on to the legal site suggests they were not giving us the full story. If the legal plots are owned by friends or relatives, then why did they

not allow them on to their pitches a lot sooner?"

Len Gridley, 52, from Oak Road, Crays Hill, said: "This is a joke. They have cut the electricity, but they have got power on the legal plots. It's not over until the last one pulls off."

Kathleen McCarthy, a spokeswoman for the site, denied anyone had other homes and said they could only use the legal pitches, owned by relatives, for a temporary period until the owners return.

She said: "People say we have other places, but I can tell you Dale Farm is our home and we have nowhere else to go. Do you think we would be putting ourselves through this otherwise?"

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BATTLE OF DALE FARM**FALL OF TOWER**

■ Destined for the chop - a machine dismantles the scaffolded gateway to Dale Farm

Bailiffs cut protesters free from scaffold barricades

TENSIONS ran high as bailiffs cut protesters free from the barricades.

Protesters camping out on the gantry at the top of the scaffolded barricades had been forcibly removed on Wednesday afternoon, but six remained chained to the top to lower parts of the structure and surrounding trees.

At 7.15am yesterday, riot police formed lines in front of the barricades and

bailiffs used machinery to cut through the ties protesters had attached themselves to.

A pair of supporters who had volunteered to be legal advisers for the Dale Farm Solidarity campaign group were cut free in duvets to keep the chill out.

Supporters who had volunteered to be legal advisers for the Dale Farm Solidarity campaign group were cut free in duvets to keep the chill out.



Picture: AL UNDERWOOD BA50875_62

BATTLE OF DALE FARM**SYMBOLISES END**

■ Wrecked - the machine made short work of the gateway, leaving it a pile of rubble



■ Scream of protest - a campaigner is removed from the scaffolding

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THE scaffold tower that came to symbolise the Dale Farm travellers' resistance was finally torn down yesterday.

After the last protesters who were chained and concreted on to vehicles and the base of the structure were removed in the morning, heavy machinery got to work.

This was in stark contrast to last month's failed first eviction, when a small group of bailiffs and Basildon Council leader Tony Ball approached the gate and meekly asked through a faulty loud speaker if there was anything he could have stopped the bailiffs.

Protesters, including the elderly, huddled out of their homes asking neighbours: "What's going on down there?" as they went to join the crowd.

There were a few screams of discontent from about 30 protesters who remained on the site yesterday.

But there was none of the violence that had broken out in response to police first entering the illegal camp on Wednesday morning.

Instead of hurling abuse at the bailiffs, the group of travellers seemed resigned to the

inevitable fact they must now eventually have to leave.

There was a hull as bailiffs were finally allowed to secure other areas of the site before the rest of the tower was pulled down about 10am.

Removing the barricade was another major step for Basildon Council after its successful start to the clearance with

police.

The scaffolding first went up weeks before the initial eviction vote in June 2005.

It was soon barricaded with scaffolding poles which were later removed at the request of the fire service.

It was more heavily fortified this year with wood, concrete and vehicles as the eviction loomed.

Protesters tried in vain to get English Heritage to list it as a symbol of the battle of Dale Farm last month, but the request was refused.

BATTLE OF DALE FARM



■ Trying to stay put - a protester with her hand encased in a barrel of concrete

Picture: CHRIS RADBURN



■ Daily life goes on - a traveller and a child pass by the officers on guard



■ Guarding the barricade - two officers



BATTLE OF DALE FARM



■ Bailiffs at work - two protesters are surrounded by security while they are removed from their positions

Picture: CHRIS RADBURN



■ Coming down - the Dale Farm scaffolding tower

Picture: MIKE MINERS BA51003_06



■ Watching - a police officer in protective gear

BATTLE OF DALE FARM



■ Going – travellers and protesters peacefully leave Dale Farm followed by the world's media

Picture: AL UNDERWOOD BA51018

Puxon: I shall not be condemning violence

By GINA MARDEN

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TRAVELLER campaigner Grattan Puxon refused to condemn violent protesters – and revealed travellers had urged activists to come along to support them.

When questioned over whether he supported violent outbursts, Mr Puxon said: "We asked the protesters to come here. The violence was their response to the violence of police, who broke through the barriers. I have no condemnation of them whatsoever."

In the long-term, Mr Puxon said he is hopeful a public inquiry taking place next month will allow travellers to stay elsewhere in the Basildon borough.

Held on November 22 by the planning inspectorate, the hearing will determine whether land made available by the Government in Church Road, Laindon, is suitable for a traveller site.

Meanwhile, resident Kathleen McCarthy vowed to return to Dale Farm in a year to see if it has been returned to green belt.

She added: "This won't be



■ Grattan Puxon – speaking up Picture: MIKE MINERS BA50961_13

returned to green belt, so all this will be for no reason."

She also believes what she has witnessed in the past two days has been completely unacceptable.

She said: "I've seen a resident with blood dripping down their face, and another who has been put in hospital by police batoning.

"The way in which the police are acting has shocked and outraged everyone here. Dale Farm

will weigh heavily on Britain for generations. Our entire community is being ripped apart by Basildon Council and the politicians in Government."

Ali Saunders, a Dale Farm supporter, added: "The way Basildon Council conducted the eviction confirmed what had become clear throughout the legal process – Basildon sees travellers as second-class citizens who it wants to chase out of the area."

A day of tension and accusations

DAY two of the eviction was another drawn-out process, with no lack of tension in the air.

Bailiffs soon got to work on the barricade, but for much of the rest of the day it appeared to be another stand-off.

Then there was a dramatic turn at 3.30pm when travellers and protesters agreed to leave the camp together.

They wanted to go before Basildon Council served 48-hour eviction notices on a small number of pitches.

However, tensions flared after Lorraine Browne, solicitor to the council, was accompanied on a walk around the site with riot police.

This led to an impromptu protest march around the site by travellers and protesters.

Some shouted abuse at the

police and condemned the council for trying to inflame the situation when a peaceful solution had been offered.

Traveller Mary Sheridan said: "Why would they do that when we said we would go? It seems it is them that wants the fight."

A council spokesman said it had been agreed with campaigner Candy Sheridan that Mrs Browne would do the checks, but not serve the notices, before the hostile reaction followed.

He added: "We could not send her around on her own."

Bailiffs removed the first mobile home shortly after 7pm yesterday evening and expect to start work on the remainder today.

The 48-hour notices will now be served today, but the council could not confirm exactly how many pitches were affected.